

John H. Smith's Row
209-215 High Street
Petersburg
Virginia

HABS No. VA-646

HABS
VA
27-PET,
24-

PHOTOGRAPHS
WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey
Office of Archeology and Historic Preservation
National Park Service
Department of the Interior
Washington, D.C. 20240

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

HABS No. VA-646

JOHN H. SMITH'S ROW

HABS
VA
27-PET
24-

Location: 209-215 High Street, Petersburg, Virginia

Present Owners: Historic Petersburg Foundation, Inc.,
P. O. Box 267
Petersburg, Virginia (209)

Ethel and Mary Curtin, address unknown (211)

Gene Francis Wade, c/o G. E. Matthews,
118 West Tabb Street
Petersburg, Virginia (213)

Gerald L. Lavenstein and Max Tobias
c/o Alsage Realty Company
27 Walnut Boulevard
Petersburg, Virginia (215)

Present Occupant: Unoccupied

Present Use: Vacant, were private residences

Brief Statement of Significance: These four fine Federal row houses were built c. 1837-1838 and are notable on the exterior for the wooden door light and iron fence remaining on and along the south facade of the 209 house. On the interior the fine mantels and other woodwork are noteworthy. There was originally a fifth house of this row at 207 High Street, which was destroyed c. 1950.

PART 1. HISTORICAL INFORMATION:

A. Physical History:

1. Date of erection: c. 1837-1838. (Landbook 1837 and 1838, handwritten bound manuscripts in the Clerk's Office of Hustings Court, Petersburg, Virginia)
2. Architect, etc.: Unknown
3. Original and subsequent owners: Complete chain of title for the 209 house follows. Deed and Will Books

are in the Clerk's Office of Hustings Court at Petersburg.

<u>Date</u>	<u>Grantor</u>	<u>Grantee</u>
12/12/1834	Bowden, William (property)	Smith, John H.
3/14/1838	Smith, John H.	Brander, John A.
7/26/1842 Book 13 page 42	Bragg, Joseph, tr. Stainback, George, N., tr.	Osborne, P. C.
6/20/1856 Book 22 page 730	Osborne, Pleasant C. Edmund H. Dunlop, James	Macfarland, Caroline
3/25/1875 Will Book 6 page 176	Macfarland, Caroline	Wilson, Sarah J. Osborne, Carrie P.
7/19/1916 Will Book 11 page 49	Wilson, Sarah J.	McClevy, Adelina
8/24/1916 Will Book 11 page 416	Osborne, Caroline P.	McClevy, Adelina
2/15/1928 Book 115 page 259	McClevy, Adelina O.	Roberts, Anna Mae
11/7/1944 Book 150 page 431	Roberts, Anna Mae H. E.	Jolly, Vera G.
7/18/1946 Book 157 page 186	Jolly, Vera G. Burnell W.	Brinkley, Henry W.
9/25/1967 Book 287 page 645	Brinkley H. Preston, ex. Lavenstein, J. H., ex. Victor W., ex.	Dunlop, Nannette F.
12/15/1967 Book 289 page 97	Dunlop, Nannette F. John M.	Historic Petersburg Foundation, Inc.

4. Original plans, construction, etc.: Unknown
5. Alterations and additions: Unknown
6. Important old views: Unknown

B. Historical Events Connected with the Structure:

Charles Jackson Pannill, who was born at No. 4 "Smith's Row," (215 High St.), was an outstanding pioneer in the field of radio. On August 7, 1911, he received the first certificate of skill in radio communication issued by the United States government and, on December 13, 1912, he was the first man to be licensed by the United States government as a wireless operator. He was associated in radio experiments with Professor Reginald Fessenden from 1902 to 1907, and he sent the first wireless message across the Atlantic Ocean, from Brant Rock, Mass. to Machrihanish, Scotland in 1906.

He served as superintendent of installation and operation of the Marconi Wireless Telegraph Company of America from 1912 to 1914 and was with the United States Navy from 1914 to 1919, during a portion of which period he was assistant to the director of naval communications.

He was subsequently president of the Independent Wireless Telegraph Company and of the Radiomarine Corporation of America. He also served as president of RCA Institutes, Inc., from 1932 to 1947, was chairman of the board of editors of RCA Review and was a member of the board of advisors of the RCA Laboratories at Princeton, N. J. He was a delegate to six international telecommunications conferences and was the author of Commercial Traffic Regulations of the Naval Communications Service.

He received the Marconi Gold Medal of Achievement from the Veteran Wireless Operators Association in 1942, and in 1937 was decorated by the King of the Belgians as a Chevalier of the Order of Leopold in recognition of his eminent services to international marine communications.

Charles J. Pannill was a son of Captain Thomas Pannill, Confederate States Army, and a grandson of William Pannill, mayor of Petersburg who was president of the Southside Railroad from 1850 to 1857. His death occurred in Harkness Pavilion, New York City, February 7, 1955.

Prepared by Randall J. Biallas
University of Illinois, Urbana
August 1968

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. General Statement:

1. Architectural character: A brick row house of the late Federalist period. The row has excellent exterior proportions and the remains of very handsome interior detailing.
2. Condition of fabric: There are four buildings in the group and all four are in general disrepair - one building has been badly burned in the interior.

B. Description of Exterior:

1. Overall dimensions and shape: The row is two-and-a-half stories plus a basement. The overall dimensions are 105' x 54'9". It is rectangular in shape and divided into four equal units, 24'6" x 54'9", separated by party walls. All units are facing the street (High Street) and are set back approximately 12'. Approximately 20' has been added to the rear of each unit - the original depth being only 34'9". There was originally another building in the row, of the same dimensions.
2. Foundations: Not known, but probably brick as basement walls are brick.
3. Wall construction: All original walls are brick, reddish brown in color. Bond: five stretchers and a header. The end wall of the four units is the other side wall exposed (other butts another row). The brick here has been stuccoed over. On the rear a "patchwork" addition has been added to all four units and covers 80% of the original brickwork. The addition is a conglomeration of wood and concrete block with random asphalt covering. The brickwork in the rear that is exposed is more sloppily done than that in front.
4. Chimneys: There are eight brick chimneys in the entire row - two for each unit. They are located along party walls to the left of the front entrance (in each case) and halfway down on each side of the roof. The rear chimneys are about 2' lower than the front ones.

5. Openings:

- a. Doorways and doors: There are three exterior doors for each unit. The front door (first floor) in one unit has been removed. An interesting feature of one of the doorways (no. 213) is the transom light over the door. It is moulded wood lattice set in glass and painted black.
 - b. Windows and shutters: All the windows in the original portion appear to date from the construction of the building. The rear windows in the addition are contemporary. The original windows have thick wooden sills and lintels set in the brick wall, with moulded wood roundels at each side of the lintel. They are double hung with six lights in each sash and there are four bays per unit. There are no shutters although there possibly were originally.
6. Porches and areaways: There is a small concrete stoop at the front entrance to each unit. An areaway approximately 3' wide leads to the basement at the front of each unit, with the basement entrance located directly below the stoop and first floor entrance.
7. Structural system: There is a brick party wall system with joists on the first and second floor running between wood party walls. The joists in the attic run in opposite direction, tying into the front and rear walls. The roof rafters tie into the attic floor joists at the exterior walls, which are corbeled out at the top to take the extra load.
8. Roof shape and covering: The roof is gabled with tin covering - ribs 18" to 24" o. c. The tin roof covering is probably not original. The building (and the roof) has height differential of approximately 3' at the center party wall of four units. The east two are lower due to a grade change.
9. Dormers: There are three dormers on the four units, each centered about the unit, and all on the rear. Unit no. 213 has no dormer but has a trapdoor to the roof in the same location as the dormers.

C. Description of Interior:

1. Floor plans (general): described below for a single unit (no. 213); all the units are similar.
 - a. First floor: The original building is box shaped with a single loaded entry corridor along the left party wall. Basically there are two rooms with a fireplace in both rooms. Both have a high ceiling. The stairs to the second floor are directly opposite the front door, and at the rear of the entry hall.
 - b. Second floor: It also has basically two rooms off of the hallway, in the same manner as the first floor except for one small room at the end of the hall, thus making the second floor hallway shorter. This room is probably the result of remodeling.
 - c. Attic and basement: Both comprise one room (in the original part).
 - d. Addition: An addition has been added to the rear at the basement, first and second floors. It consists of three small rooms on each floor.
2. Stairways: One, at rear of the entry hall. Each stairway has a landing midway, except to the basement. All stairs are open. There is an ornamental newel post at the base of the rail on the first floor. There is also an interesting scrolled wood moulding on the side of each riser.
3. Flooring: There is wood plank flooring with linoleum covering on the first and second floors. The attic floor-wood planking, stripped up in several places, exposes the wood joists. Planks there vary 4" to 7" in width. The basement floor is concrete. The flooring in the addition is similar.
4. Wall and ceiling finish: All walls in the original building - basement through second floor - are plaster on brick, with badly peeling wallpaper on that in most cases. The basement ceiling is suspended acoustical tile - 7" below the original ceiling. The first and second floors have plaster

ceilings. The attic has exposed rafters. In the addition, walls vary from drywall to block and plaster. All ceilings in the addition are plaster.

5. Doorways and doors: The first floor doorways in the original building have ornate moulded door frames, painted white, with small decorative flower mouldings at each end of the lintel. There are large double doors connecting the major rooms on the first and second floor. Most doors in the original building appear to date from the building. The interior doorways in the addition are more recent and of little note.
6. Decorative features and trim: The fireplace in the front room, first floor, has a very ornate cast-iron mantel. Other mantels are less decorative and partially destroyed. The moulded side panels (previously mentioned) in the open staircase have scrolled wood carvings, typical of many of the stylish homes of the period.
7. Lighting: Modern
8. Heating: The fireplaces are blocked off and any heating has been removed. Probably the last used oil stoves vented through the fireplace flue.

D. Site and Surroundings:

1. Orientation and general setting: The building faces Southeast at the corner of High Street and N. Market Street, in a semi-residential area on the fringe of the downtown area. The rear of the row faces Low Street parallel to High. The terrain drops from west to east along High and those units on the east are several feet lower. This drop is reflected in the "stairstep" arrangement of the units. (See Roof shape and covering.)
2. Outbuildings: There is one outbuilding behind the four units. It is a two-story brick structure with a chimney and a fireplace, open at first level on the High Street side. It was probably a carriage house at one time.
3. Landscaping: The most notable exterior feature in

this regard is a decorative cast-iron fence along the sidewalk in front of the row. The cast-iron members are capped by a flowered palmette. There was originally a gate to each entrance but all but one of them has been removed and a different type of fence has also been placed in front of the units.

Prepared by John M. McRae
Supervisory Architect, HABS
July 1968

PART III. PROJECT INFORMATION

These records are part of the documentation made during the 1968 Petersburg Summer Project, undertaken by the Historic American Buildings Survey in cooperation with The Historic Petersburg Foundation, Inc., with financial assistance from The Virginia Historic Landmarks Commission. During the summer, records were made of twenty-two buildings in the city.

The project was under the general direction of James C. Massey, Chief, Historic American Buildings Survey. Project Supervisor was John M. McRae of the University of Florida. The recording team was composed of Randall J. Biallas, historian (University of Illinois, Urbana), and student assistant architects Michael Hamilton (University of Arizona), Thomas J. Sanford (Washington State University), and Edwin S. Smith, Jr. (Rhode Island School of Design). Photographs were made by George Eisenman.